

Bronislava Nijinska (1891–1972)

Bronislava Nijinska, who was born in Minsk in 1891 and died on 21 February 1972, was a Russian dancer, choreographer and ballet mistress. She was the sister of the renowned dancer Vaslav Nijinsky.

Early dancing career

Trained at the Imperial Ballet School in St Petersburg, she gained her first professional experience as a ballet dancer with the Mariinsky Theatre.

In 1909, she followed her brother Vaslav into Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. She attracted notice in the role of the Street Dancer in Fokine's *Petrushka* (1911).

The biggest influence on Nijinska's career was always her brother, and she assisted him with his creative work. She initially rehearsed *The Afternoon of a Faun* (1912) in secret with him. She was enormously influenced by the abstract nature of his movements, rooted in the ground, and by his group effects.

In 1915, she presented her first solos, including *Feuilles d'automne* (*Autumn Leaves*), following which, in 1919, she opened a dance school, the School of Movement, in Kiev.

Role as a choreographer and ballet mistress

Following a disagreement between Sergei Diaghilev and his ballet master, Léonide Massine, Nijinska returned to the Ballets Russes in 1921 to lead the company. She stamped her mark on its history, improving its academic technique.

Her masterpiece undoubtedly remains *Les Noces* (*The Wedding*, 1923), inspired by the music of Igor Stravinsky. The ballet tells the tale of a Russian peasant wedding, and blends primitivist inspiration with contemporary movement.

In 1924, Nijinska choreographed various ballets for the company, including *Le Train Bleu* (*The Blue Train*) and *Les Fâcheux* (*The Bores*), in which she danced one of the male roles herself. The same year, she created another important ballet. *Les Biches* (*The Does*) depicts liberated young women at a house party, satirising high society.

From 1932 to 1937, she led her own dance company, before moving to Los Angeles, where she opened a dance school and worked as a guest choreographer for other companies and theatres.

Links with Monaco

Nijinska performed in the Principality many times.

In 1924, she choreographed a number of ballets and operas at the Théâtre de Monte-Carlo:

- On 3 January 1924, the premiere of ballet *Les tentations de la bergère, ou l'Amour Vainqueur* (*Temptations of a Shepherdess, or Love Victorious*) took place.
- On 5 January 1924, the opera *Médecin malgré lui* (*The Mock Doctor*), based on a play by Molière and set to music by Charles Gounod, was performed.
- On 6 January 1924, *Les Biches*, which explored the sexual mores of the 1920s with a candour never before seen on a ballet stage, was performed.
- On 19 January 1924, *Les Fâcheux*, based on a Molière play with music by George Auric, was performed.
- On 6 April 1924, *La nuit sur le Mont-Chauve* (*Night on Bald Mountain*), with music by Modest Mussorgsky, was performed.

In 1926, Nijinska choreographed *Romeo and Juliet*, a ballet in two parts, the first of which was performed on 4 May at the Théâtre de Monte-Carlo.